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Is There A Lost Tribe Of Jews In Appalachia?

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Is There a Lost Tribe of Jews in Appalachia?

There was a group of people who lived in TN and Eastern KY known as Melungeon. Their ancestry and origin have long been debated. However, there is a lot of evidence to suggest they were at least partially Jewish. Is there a lost tribe of Jews in Appalachia?

Evidence For A Lost Tribe of Jews In Appalachia

There is much reason to believe the Melungeon people are a lost tribe of Jews in Appalachia. The book **Appalachian Lore (https://www.amazon.com/Appalachian-Lore-Haints-Hexes-Hoo-Doos/dp/153031710X/ref=sr_1_1?crid=XDI7RQFLCYFH&keywords=Appalachian+lore&qid=1698105527&sprefix=appalachian+l%2)** says that when discovered they were "practicing a verbal form of Christianity, heavy with attributes of Judaism." Elizabeth Caldwell Hirschman, author of **Melungeons: The Last Lost Tribe in America (https://www.amazon.com/Melungeons-Last-Tribe-America-Melungeon/dp/0865548617/ref=sr_1_1?crid=2Z9Y0RHIULMVV&keywords=Melungeons%3A+The+Last+Lost+Tribe+in+America&qid=1)** claimed that there were Sephardic Jews from Portugal amongst the settlers of the Roanoke colony that first settled in America and mysteriously disappeared. She believed these people moved further into the Appalachian Mountains and bred with Native Americans and African American slaves. She believes they eventually became what is now known as Melungeons.

They were known to attend services on Saturday, throw out any eggs that had blood spots, refuse to eat pork, and heavily wash and salt all other meats. Further, many of the family names associated with Melungeons are also Jewish according to **DNA Consultants (https://dnaconsultants.com/20-years-of-melungeon-research/)**. One of those names is Chavis. Chavis came from the Sephardic Jewish surname Chavez which derived from the name of a town in Portugal.

Jewish Ancestry And DNA

This makes sense because when the Melungeons were pressed for an origin story they always repeated the story of a Portuguese shipwreck off the coast of North Carolina. This would mean they could have been Sephardic Jews. Sephardic Jews are a diaspora group from Spain and Portugal. DNA evidence has shown that Melungeons have high percentages of Iberian (Spain and Portuguese) genes. In fact, that ancestry outranks any other for Melungeons according to **DNA Consultants (https://dnaconsultants.com/20-years-of-melungeon-research/)**. Thus, this area seems the most likely for their point of origin when you combine DNA findings with their own origin story. **DNA Consultants (https://dnaconsultants.com/20-years-of-melungeon-research/)** reported, " Florida Atlantic University sociology professor Abraham Lavender believes this distribution of DNA reflects the very footsteps of Jews fleeing persecution throughout the early modern era, although he also raises the possibility that it represents a far more ancient pattern of Jewish populations."

Persecution of the Lost Tribe of Jews in Appalachia

Unfortunately, the government and other Appalachian people persecuted the Melungeons into silence. The government passed laws against African Americans owning land etc. They then sent a threatening letter to some of the Melungeons about "Africans pretending to be white." Eventually, the government ordered that Melungeons be **listed as people of color. (http://www.yoyenta.com/the-jews-of-appalachia/?unapproved=151063&moderation-hash=0d4956b406690ad58d0dcd1fe8c2e7db#comment-151063)** These laws stripped the Melungeons of many of their rights. This resulted in many destroying their birth certificates and refusing to tell their children their true heritage in order to avoid persecution. Therefore, much of their story has been lost to time. With that story, so was lost much of their religion. Christianity was widespread in the mountains. So, the Melungeon's descendants who did not have the chance to learn their true heritage joined the Christian faith. In this way, most knowledge of the Jewish people in Appalachia was forgotten.

I am Jewish by conversion. However, I always had a sense that something was wrong with the Christian religion, from an early age. Was this really my Portuguese genes reminding me that I am Jewish? Might, I, a girl from KY be Jewish by birth and not even know it? There are many stories of people from **Appalachia (https://www.patheos.com/blogs/reclaimingthetruth/2023/09/can-a-christian-be-a-witch/)** who have found out in adulthood that they are in fact of Jewish descent. I intend to have a DNA test done because I believe my soul has always known it was Jewish.